

October 9, 2006

The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger
Governor of California
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, CA 95814

S. Kimberly Belshe
Secretary of the Health and Human Services Agency
1600 Ninth Street, Room 460
Sacramento, CA 95814

Cindy Ehnes
Director of the California Department of Managed Care
980 Ninth Street, Suite 500
Sacramento, CA 95814-2725

Dear Sir and Madams:

Every day in California, patient care is compromised because vital health information is locked in dozens of computer systems that can't talk to each other or in stacks of paper files. The California Regional Health Information Organization (CalRHIO) and its stakeholders have been working for the past two years to change that. The Governor's Executive Order to promote the advancement of health information exchange (HIE) in California is a vital step toward realizing the benefits of improved safety, quality, and efficiency that HIE can deliver. With the strong foundation CalRHIO has already established and the commitment of the State to develop a comprehensive State policy agenda for health information technology and exchange, progress can be made rapidly.

We support and endorse the seven action items outlined in the Governor's Executive Order. The following provides an overview of the areas CalRHIO has addressed that will be helpful to the State in carrying out the actions outlined in the Governor's Executive Order. The actions are paraphrased below.

Defining Goals and Value of HIT:

Over the past two years, CalRHIO has defined the goals and value of health information exchange in collaboration with more than 60 health care-related public and private organizations and participation by more than 400 people on work groups, committees, and projects. Goals and values continue to be refined by CalRHIO's Board of Directors, created in January 2006. The Board is comprised of top health care leaders representing all key stakeholder groups, including safety net providers and consumers.

In defining goals and values, bringing together stakeholders on a regular basis has been key. CalRHIO early on assumed the role of convener and educator, holding five statewide Summits and numerous stakeholder forums, as well as assisting local and regional health information exchange efforts in educating their communities. Hundreds of stakeholders from across the state have attended these events.

Inventory of State HIE Initiatives:

One of CalRHIO's first projects upon its inception was to identify and engage health information exchange efforts going on around the state. To date, 16 local and regional initiatives are at different levels of progress. CalRHIO continuously tracks their activity and publishes data and contact information on our Web site. We also convene regional efforts to help the initiatives learn from each other.

Role of the State vs. Others:

Based on feedback from our working groups and meetings, it is clear that CalRHIO's stakeholders are in support of state involvement and funding for HIT and HIE. To date, CalRHIO has acted as the central hub for other HIE networks in California and provided leadership on interoperability across provider and payer systems. We are excited to share with the State the broad and deep understanding we've gained of the elements necessary to make health information exchange a reality in California.

Standards and Interoperability Requirements:

During 2005, stakeholders validated CalRHIO's position as a trusted, neutral statewide entity by requesting that we develop and publish a list of recommended standards to enable health information exchange in California. This list of standards was published in early 2006 and aligns with those promulgated by the federal government. Recommendations will be continuously refined to incorporate the national perspective and input from California health care organizations.

Identifying Legal and Regulatory Barriers and Protecting Privacy and Security:

CalRHIO has formed a highly successful public-private partnership with the California Office of HIPAA Implementation under a federal privacy and security project. Numerous stakeholder meetings have been convened around the state to discuss business practices, barriers, and proposed solutions concerning privacy and security issues in health information exchange. These sessions have greatly advanced the understanding of current practices and where changes need to be made. In addition, we have developed a standardized statewide data sharing agreement for California organizations that will be providing and receiving data.

Public-Private Partnerships:

The partnership between CalRHIO and CalOHI can be used in the future as a model for collaboration and coordination. The 20 member Steering Committee is comprised of half state level and half private sector stakeholders that oversee the work of these two organizations. In addition, CalRHIO has partnered with the California Department of Health Services in applying for a Medicaid Transformation Grant from CMS. The proposal would connect public and private hospital emergency departments and community clinics in three communities to currently available electronic information on medication history and laboratory results and ePrescribing tools for Medi-Cal patients.

Performance Metrics:

CalRHIO supports pre-and post measurement to determine the success of health information exchange throughout California. As a national leader, California can provide other states and the federal government with critical information on the benefits of HIE and HIT.

The Governor's Executive Order creates a bold vision for the quality and safety of health care that Californians should receive. CalRHIO stands ready to work in partnership with the state to provide secure electronic access to vital health care information, where and when patients and providers need it. We respectfully submit a draft of proposed roles for the state and for CalRHIO in connecting California. A recent stakeholder report is also attached to provide greater detail on our accomplishments to date. We hope this information will prove useful to you in the EHealth Action Forum.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Donald G. Holmquest". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Donald" and last name "Holmquest" clearly legible.

Donald Holmquest, MD, JD, PhD
President and CEO, CalRHIO